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261300Z Sep 03

UNCLAS ABUJA 001670

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BUHARI AND ANPP HOLD MAJOR RALLY IN KANO

1. Thousands of ANPP supporters converged on Kano September 23 to attend a rally for its Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari. ANPP Chairman Don Etiebet, Vice Presidential candidate Chuba Okadigbo and Kano State Governor Ibrahim Shekarau were in attendance along with dozens of ANPP candidates from throughout the country.

2. Crowds began arriving at 0800 and by 1000 Kano was "shut down" according to BBC's Hausa radio service. Eyewitness estimates of the crowd range from "hundreds of thousands" to "two million." One told Poloff that it reminded him of Washington's "Million Man March" and another commented that it was "reminiscent of Buhari's campaign rallies" held throughout the country in the run up to the April elections. The Buhari motorcade, arriving from his home in Daura, was held up for two hours by the masses lining the streets. Inside the stadium, the situation was worse, with the crowd pressing to get close to their candidate.

3. The rally held in spite of a statement from police officials that the rally was "illegal and unauthorized." Governor Shekarau overruled the police order and urged everyone to attend and ensure that the rally was peaceful. The only security incidents during the rally came when the crowd surged, sometimes trapping people in the masses. Okadigbo apparently fainted at one point and had to be carried away. Others commented that they had been "in fear for their lives" when the urge of the crowd threatened to trample them. Police evidently used teargas at the stadium to try to disperse the crowd. One eyewitness commented that he had only seen similar crowd conditions in Mecca during the Hajj.

4. BBC and VOA Hausa services reported the rally was peaceful and had halted business throughout the city. This is the first public mass opposition political gathering since the Obasanjo government issued a ban on rallies before the April 19 Presidential elections.

5. COMMENT: Buhari had been maintaining a low profile while waiting for his suit calling for new elections to make its way through the judicial process. He remains worried that overzealous supporters could heat up the polity and the ensuing disenchantment with the performance of the Obasanjo government could result in violence, an outcome he has said he wants to avoid. Buhari likely plans to stage more rallies in the future but will continue to carefully choose the venues in order to maintain control as long as the election tribunal case (septel) is pending.  
MEECE